

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Weekly Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

January 17, 2014

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Internet-Enabled Trade a Boon to Small Businesses

16 January 2014

Washington — Internet-enabled trade, which has grown dramatically in recent years, is empowering millions of small businesses to sell their goods and services to customers around the world 24 hours a day, says an official of the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

“Internet-enabled trade allows small businesses to have an online presence, while maintaining a physical local presence and contributing to the local economy and jobs in their communities,” said Christine Sevilla, deputy assistant U.S. trade representative for small business, in a January 14 blog post.

Sevilla cited a recent series of studies of online marketplace data that found that Internet-enabled small businesses are more likely to export and reach more country markets than their offline counterparts. One study, she said, found that almost all small businesses on online marketplaces such as eBay export, and on average they reach between 24 and 39 foreign markets.

She said small businesses can increase their export sales through their company Web presence and multiple platforms.

Technology innovations are expanding the global customer base while reducing the costs of trade and reducing the importance of geographic distance in finding customers, Sevilla said. The study she cited notes that Internet access increased 300 percent in all developing markets from 2004 to 2012, while online sales in all developing markets increased 800 percent over the same period.

In 2013, the value of cross-border online trade was \$114 billion across the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, China and Brazil, with a combined 94 million online shoppers. This value is projected to increase to \$307 billion in trade and 130 million online shoppers across these countries by 2018, she said.

Sevilla noted that trade policies that promote e-commerce and Internet-enabled services, electronic payment methods and improved customs logistics can enable even more small businesses to grow and thrive globally online. She pointed to the historic trade-facilitation agreement reached in December by the United States and 159 other World Trade Organization members, which she said “increases predictability, simplicity and uniformity in customs procedures and includes key measures such as the online publication of steps to import, export, and transit goods, and use of electronic payments.”

In negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, she said, the U.S. trade representative is committed to allowing for the free flow of information to facilitate electronic commerce and to providing market access and national treatment commitments for cross-border services and Internet-enabled services such as social networking.

Religious Leaders Work for Peace in Central African Republic

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 16 January 2014

Washington — Muslim and Christian leaders in the United States and Africa are searching for ways to work together to promote peace and reconciliation in the Central African Republic (CAR), a country now devastated by sectarian violence.

U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Rashad Hussain hosted an interreligious dialogue on January 7. It brought together via an online video conference from Bangui Archbishop of Bangui Dieudonné Nzapalainga; Imam Omar Cabinelayama, president of the CAR National Islamic Association; the Reverend Nicolas Geurekoyame, president of the CAR Evangelical Association; and Catherine Samapanza, mayor of Bangui.

They shared their ideas with their U.S. counterparts: Steve Hilbert, foreign policy adviser for Africa and global development at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Mohamed Magid, president of the Islamic Society of North America.

Speaking through a French interpreter, Geurekoyame said the CAR Evangelical Association is trying to explain to church members that “this conflict is not religious, but instead it is fundamentally a political conflict.”

Cabinelayama said there is an urgent need to provide training to mediators engaged in reconciliation work. He called for teaching materials to help carry out this work.

Magid offered the services of the Islamic Society of North America — one of the largest Muslim organizations in North America — to engage religious groups in the CAR, its neighboring countries and the United States to help foster “healing and hope.” Hilbert noted that Catholic Relief Services, the official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States, is already in the country working with youth to attenuate mistrust between Muslims and Christians.

Hussain said the 7 million people that make up the Muslim community in the United States “have worked to stand for justice when the rights of others are threatened.”

"The United States recognizes and greatly appreciates your efforts in promoting peace in the Central African Republic," he told videoconference participants. "In addition to providing humanitarian assistance and support for the security efforts in CAR, we [the United States] are also promoting conflict mitigation and reconciliation efforts."

President Obama spoke directly to the people of the CAR in an audio message released December 9, 2013, to underscore the importance of reconciliation between its people.

According to a White House fact sheet released December 5, 2013, the United States will provide the CAR with the following assistance:

- Subject to congressional notification, nearly \$7.5 million to support conflict mitigation, reconciliation and peacebuilding, including interreligious peacebuilding efforts and the use of community radio to amplify peace messages and dispel rumors.
- \$125,000 in funding from the U.S. State Department to create a network of local community and interfaith religious leaders to promote peace, conflict mitigation and reconciliation efforts.

Sectarian violence and a retaliatory cycle of killing are of serious concern to the international community, which fears the political instability in the CAR may increase bloodshed in the country and spread extremism throughout the region.

According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as of December 9, 2013, one in 10 Central Africans — 533,000 people — had fled their homes, and one in five — 1.1 million people — did not have enough food to eat. On November 26, 2013, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said the CAR is "descending into complete chaos before our eyes" and presents a "profoundly important test to our international solidarity and our responsibility to prevent atrocities."

In testimony delivered December 17, 2013, before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Africa, Earl Gast, assistant administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development, said Christians and Muslims have a history of peaceful relations in the CAR, but "the roots of conflict are in an imbalance of power, resources and governance." The escalating violence, Gast said, is taking "a dangerous new turn toward deliberate attacks against civilian communities along religious lines."

The United States is working with partners "to find a balance between expanding assistance into conflict areas

and reducing the risk to humanitarian actors and beneficiaries," he said.

Global Economy to Grow Modestly in 2014, World Bank Says

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 15 January 2014

Washington — The world economy is projected to grow 3.2 percent in 2014, up from 2.4 percent in 2013, with growth supported by recovery from the global economic crisis in high-income countries and picking up in developing countries, the World Bank reports.

The prospect of growth from 2014 through 2016, however, is tempered by a tapering of the U.S. monetary stimulus and by structural shifts taking place in China's economy, according to the bank's Global Economic Prospects report, released January 14.

The bank projects that growth in high-income countries will be a modest 2.2 percent in 2014 and will increase to 2.4 percent in both 2015 and 2016.

"The performance of advanced economies is gaining momentum, and this should support stronger growth in developing countries in the months to come," said World Bank President Jim Yong Kim. "To accelerate poverty reduction, developing nations will need to adopt structural reforms that promote job creation, strengthen financial systems and shore up social safety nets," he added.

The report states that global growth is expected to increase slightly to 3.4 percent in 2015 and 3.5 percent in 2016. That slow rate of growth is not cause for concern, the bank says, because it "reflects a cooling off of the unsustainable turbo-charged pre-crisis growth."

The report states that growth in developing countries is strengthening and is expected to be 5.3 percent in 2014 and edge up to 5.5 percent in 2015 and 5.7 percent in 2016. By region, the bank projects growth to be strongest in East Asia and the Pacific, at 7.2 percent in 2014 and 7.1 percent in each of the following two years.

Growth in South Asia is recovering and is projected to accelerate from 5.7 percent in 2014 to 6.7 percent in 2015 and 2016. In sub-Saharan Africa, growth is expected to firm at 5.3 percent in 2014 and rise to 5.5 percent in 2016, bolstered by strong investment in the natural resources and infrastructure sectors.

Growth in Europe and Central Asia will be 3.5 percent in 2014 and slowly rise to 3.8 percent in 2016. Latin America and the Caribbean growth is projected to be below that, at 2.9 percent in 2014, but is expected to strengthen to 3.7 percent in 2016. In the Middle East and North Africa,

growth is projected to be 2.8 percent in 2014 and 3.6 percent in 2016, held back by social and political tensions. The growth “will not be robust enough to cut significantly into underlying unemployment and spare capacity,” according to the report.

In the report, the bank states that 2014 will experience a pickup in global trade, fueled largely by more investment and consumer demand in high-income countries. However, the growth in trade will be moderated by persisting lower prices of energy, metals and minerals, and food.

The bank predicts that global interest rates are likely to rise slowly, reaching 3.6 percent by the middle of 2016. It states that if markets push up long-term rates more quickly, investment flows to developing countries could weaken.

However, it says that “by improving the longer-term outlook, credible reform agendas can go a long way towards boosting investor and market confidence.”

U.S. Urges Syrian Political Solution, Ups Aid to Refugees

15 January 2014

Washington — U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced another increase in humanitarian aid January 15 to help millions of people displaced by the three-year-old Syrian civil war.

This latest commitment made at a donors’ conference held in Kuwait City brings U.S. support to \$1.7 billion. The United States is the leading donor attempting to provide relief for more than 4 million people in Syria and more than 2 million refugees who have fled to neighboring countries.

The new funding of \$380 million will be allocated among Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. These nations are all hosting some part of the refugee population in camps, in communities or with families.

“We also want to make sure that these nations are able to keep their hospitals and their schools up and running, their economies growing,” said Kerry as he announced the increased U.S. aid on the fringes of the U.N.-sponsored donor meeting.

Kerry also expressed concern for more than 1 million children displaced in the course of the war. The United Nations reports that at least 3 million children have dropped out of school as the conflict disrupts normal life. U.S. aid will be targeted to make sure that children receive medical care and are able to continue their schooling.

Increased assistance can help relieve suffering and address needs in the short term, but pressing for a political solution to the violence remains the most important goal, Kerry said.

“We really need to undo the underlying cause of the creation of those refugees,” Kerry said in remarks to reporters. The Geneva II process is a multilateral initiative in motion since 2012 to attempt to forge a political solution. Participants in those talks are set to reconvene on January 22, and Kerry hinted that Syria may concede to “a ceasefire in whatever number of places that might be able to be achieved,” an action that would lend “a more positive climate” to the talks, Kerry said.

The U.S. secretary of state also said, “The refusal of humanitarian access by both the regime and elements of the opposition is an outrage.” He recounted reports from humanitarian agencies about being barred from reaching needy populations by armed groups. The denial of assistance in this way is “an affront to human dignity,” he said.

Offering more specifics about the aid package, Kerry said the largest single share — almost \$180 million — will be directed to people still inside Syria in need of medical care, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene. Many U.N. and nongovernmental agencies have staff at work on the ground to deliver those commodities and services, including the U.N. Refugee Agency, the World Food Programme, UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration and others.

Beside Syria itself, Lebanon is among the nations most seriously affected by the influx of refugees. With a population of just over 4 million, Lebanon has absorbed more than 850,000 refugees, according to the U.N. Refugee Agency. The newest U.S. relief funding directs almost \$80 million to Lebanon to help with the ongoing distribution of millions of blankets, mattresses and winter clothing.

Jordan is to receive about \$60 million, according to a State Department fact sheet issued January 15. A particular concern for children’s well-being and education has gained U.S. attention in Jordan, and the new support will help families in which children have been taken out of school and put to work to ease family hardships.

The U.N. Refugee Agency reports that about 400,000 Syrians are living in established refugee camps. Turkey is hosting 21 camps, and about \$30 million of the newly announced U.S. aid will be directed to needs there. Twelve camps in Iraq will receive U.S. funding.

News reports indicate the Kuwait City meeting ended with donor nations making new commitments of more

than \$1.5 billion in assistance for the Syrian humanitarian crisis.

Award Honors Work to Strengthen U.S.-Japan Alliance

By Army Sergeant 1st Class Tyrone C. Marshall Jr. | American Forces Press Service | 15 January 2014

This article was originally published on the Defense Department website on January 14.

Washington — Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and former Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Ryozo Kato presented the ambassador's namesake prize to Pentagon Asia-policy expert Christopher Johnstone in honor of his contributions toward strengthening U.S.-Japanese relations.

"We're here to honor Chris Johnstone ... for his dedication to strengthening U.S.-Japanese relations, in particular, the U.S.-Japan alliance," Hagel said.

Hagel was joined by the current Japanese ambassador to Washington, Kenichiro Sasae, as Johnstone, accompanied by his wife, Mikiko, was recognized for his dedication to the two nations.

The Kato Prize was created in 2008 to honor the career and spirit of Ambassador Kato when he retired as Japan's U.S. ambassador. Kato was recognized for inspiring a generation of Japanese and American officials with his persistent and patriotic commitment to building a stronger alliance.

Johnstone's award credited him with playing a central role in launching the bilateral defense guidelines review, navigating the tensions in the East China Sea, and achieving new progress on bilateral plans to realign U.S. forces on Okinawa and in the Western Pacific.

During the ceremony, Hagel noted Kato's affinity for quoting former Secretary of State George Schultz.

"Shultz once said that working with allies is a lot like gardening," Hagel said. "It requires constant attention, constant effort."

"Chris Johnstone has proven himself to be an exceptional gardener all his career, and especially here at DOD since he arrived in 2010," Hagel said.

"Everyone who works on Asia policy at DOD — and some are here — know that Chris has played a critical role in helping this alliance grow, and this alliance strengthen and deepen," Hagel said.

The defense secretary said when the outside policy

community recognizes someone that is making a difference, "that's something very special."

"It represents the real-world impact of Chris's quiet determination to strengthen our alliance since he first visited Japan more than 20 years ago. Over the last four months, Chris' efforts have yielded significant and tangible progress," he added.

Hagel pointed to the first 2+2 meeting between U.S. and Japanese ministers and secretaries of state and defense which were held in Japan as part of that progress.

"We announced that for the first time since 1997, we'll be revising the guidelines for U.S.-Japan defense cooperation." The most significant milestone achieved so far, Hagel said, is in the realignment of U.S. forces on Okinawa, which happened when the landfill permit for the Futenma Replacement Facility was approved.

"All of this serves as a very clear demonstration that the U.S.-Japan alliance can handle complex and difficult problems that might otherwise prevent us from effectively dealing with 21st-century security challenges," Hagel said.

"And it would not have been possible without Chris's leadership, his persistence, his hard work, and his gardening," he said.

The defense secretary also highlighted a note he received from the U.S. Ambassador to Japan Carline Kennedy "extending her congratulations" to Johnstone.

"We appreciate Chris's dedication to the U.S.-Japan alliance, including his steadfast work on the 2013 2+2 joint statement," Hagel quoted. "Chris, your commitment and example is an inspiration to all 'alliance managers,' and we look forward to continuing to work alongside you in the future."

Hagel expressed his gratitude to Johnstone for his "indispensable role in helping take the U.S.-Japan relationship to the next level."

"We are all grateful for your service, and we are all very proud of your accomplishments," he said. "And I appreciate the support you have provided me, as you have other leaders of this institution over the years."

"We all wish you much continued success, and to Mikiko," Hagel said. "And we thank you."

President Obama, Secretary Kerry Discuss Negotiations with Iran

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
13 January 2014

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry says the international community has taken “a critical, significant step” toward reaching a resolution that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

At the same time, the international community will provide Iran with limited and targeted relief from the most stringent economic sanctions it has imposed, Kerry said. The relief will be phased in to match Iran’s efforts to meet its commitments.

Beginning January 20, for the first time in almost a decade, Iran’s nuclear program will not be able to advance, and some of its program will be rolled back, Kerry said January 12. Iranian negotiators and representatives from six nations led by the European Union agreed to a six-month plan that will open the way to a more complete agreement to end concerns about Iran’s program, he added.

“Iran will voluntarily take immediate and important steps between now and January 20 to halt the progress of its nuclear program,” Kerry said in a prepared statement. The plan was agreed to initially during negotiations in Geneva in November 2013.

Iran has agreed to limit its enrichment of uranium to no more than 5 percent by not installing or starting up additional centrifuges or using next-generation centrifuges. The 5 percent enrichment level is considered the standard level for electric-power generation. Coupled with that commitment is a commitment to permit new and more frequent inspections of Iran’s nuclear sites by inspection teams from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to verify that Iran is meeting its commitments.

Kerry said Iran will also continue to render its entire stockpile of 20 percent-enriched uranium unusable for further enrichment. He added that the international community will remain vigilant in the verification of Iran’s actions.

“Taken together, these and other steps will advance our goal of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon,” President Obama said in a separate statement.

Obama also said that “in return, over the next six months the United States and our P5+1 partners — the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China, as well as the European Union — will begin to implement modest relief so long as Iran fulfills its obligations and as we

pursue a comprehensive solution to Iran’s nuclear program.”

At issue is Iran’s uranium-enrichment program, which the international community has long believed was part of a program for the manufacture of nuclear weapons, though Iranian officials have claimed the enrichment processing has been for use in a medical-research reactor and for electric-energy generation.

As a consequence, the United Nations, the United States and the international community have imposed a series of political and economic sanctions against Iran.

“Unprecedented sanctions and tough diplomacy helped to bring Iran to the negotiating table, and I’m grateful to our partners in Congress who share our goal of preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon,” Obama said. Some members of Congress have in recent months proposed additional sanctions, but the administration has asked that no further legislative actions be taken until the current negotiations could be completed.

“The \$4.2 billion in restricted Iranian assets that Iran will gain access to as part of the agreement will be released in regular installments throughout the six months,” Kerry said. But the next phase poses the greater challenge, Kerry said, and that involves reaching a final and comprehensive agreement that will resolve outstanding concerns by the international community about the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program.

It has been the stated goal of the United States and its allies to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, which would threaten regional stability in the Middle East. But the United States has equally been adamant about negotiating a diplomatic resolution to the disagreement, Kerry said.

In September 2013, Obama welcomed efforts by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani at the opening of the U.N. General Assembly to renew the six-nation talks and reach an accord on inspections by IAEA monitors.

The rapid meeting schedule in October and November that resumed after Obama and Rouhani spoke by telephone in September was an effort to ensure that the pace of the work proceeded quickly but cautiously, a senior U.S. official told journalists.

International Collaboration Is Key for Future Space Ventures

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 10 January 2014

Washington — The space age began more than 50 years ago, driven by the competition that marked the spirit of

the Cold War. Today, with more than 80 nations working together to use data from the International Space Station, collaboration has supplanted competition as an organizational principle for space activities.

The transition was marked January 9 in Washington at the first high-level meeting of the International Space Exploration Forum. More than 30 nations sent top officials to plot humanity's new course beyond the bounds of Earth.

"Competition has reached its limits," said Paul Weissenberg of the European Commission's Directorate for Enterprise and Industry. "Ambitious space programs are beyond the reach of most countries."

Recognition of that fact led the European Commission and the European Space Agency to launch the first multilateral discussion on humanity's future in space in Italy in 2011 at the first meeting of the International Space Exploration Forum.

"We are witnessing a fundamental change in how we approach space exploration, with private sector partnerships and international collaborations key to our success," said NASA Administrator Charles Bolden, another speaker at the forum, hosted by the U.S. State Department.

On the same day, NASA and Orbital Science Corporation conducted a joint launch of a private cargo spacecraft, now on its way to the International Space Station on a resupply mission.

Simultaneously, U.S. and space scientists from multiple nations are working together on unmanned planetary exploration missions such as the rover Curiosity on Mars and the Cassini-Huygens mission orbiting Saturn.

Forum participants shared a belief that humankind has a destiny beyond this planet to the edges of the solar system and beyond. While that is an expansive goal for future generations, Deputy Secretary of State William Burns said space exploration has a proven record of delivering near-term benefits close to home.

"We know that space exploration fuels economic growth. It spurs scientific and technological innovation. It inspires our young people," said Burns as he welcomed the forum attendees. Space exploration also "provides direct, real and lasting benefits in nearly every aspect of modern-day life — from public health and safety to energy and information technology."

The 13-year history of the International Space Station is "the pinnacle of international cooperation in space to date," according to John Holdren, assistant to President

Obama for science and technology, another speaker at the January 9 forum. He described the Obama administration's priorities for space exploration in the decades ahead, and urged involvement by other nations in those endeavors.

"We may have different flags patched to our space suits," Holdren said, but the success aboard the space station has demonstrated that "we can transcend [national and cultural] differences in space."

Complementing the activities of the forum, 14 nations with the most advanced space agencies form the International Space Exploration Coordination Group. The group unveiled an exploration strategy several months ago that is described as a "road map" to space. Bolden said the document sends "a clear signal that the global community is committed to a unified strategy of deep-space exploration with robotic and human missions to destinations that include near-Earth asteroids, the moon and Mars."

A State Department summary of the January 9 meeting says the more than 30 national representatives also agreed that a U.N. panel in place since the 1960s remains the best arena in which to resolve the issues that will be encountered as humankind strides beyond its home planet.

"These globally important issues include the long-term sustainability of the space environment for all users, and protecting Earth from potentially hazardous objects," according to the State Department summary.

Delegates to the forum also acknowledged the importance of space-going tools in Earth observation and expanding scientific understanding of the changing environment.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)